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Ex-Con Says MCI Possible Site Of Riots

BALTIMORE (AP) — "If there is going to be an Attica in Maryland, it will be at Hagerstown."

That was the opinion expressed by Robert A. Reed, a 23-year-old black Baltimorean following his release Tuesday from a 3 ½ year sentence for armed robbery.

Reed said he feels the same explosive ingredients which triggered the Attica tragedy in New York are present at the Maryland Correctional Institution and Training Center at Hagerstown.

The former prisoner, who described himself as a black prison activist, said both facilities are in rural areas and have predominantely white staffs supervising a mostly black inmate population from urban areas.

"The guards are all white and off of farms," Reed said. "They're not used to the (black) guy from the city who has a crime habit."

Reed, who spent his first three years at Hagerstown, charged that correctional officers continually harass and sometimes beat prisoners, who are growing more resistant.

"You can degrade a man only so long, but when he's down so far, he will start picking up the pieces again," the ex-con stated. "He'll get to the point of wondering, 'what do I have to live for?' and finally rebel."

Six correctional officers at Hagerstown are facing departmental charges of allegedly beating inmates during a May riot at the facility in Western Maryland.

James Jordan, state commissioner of correction, says that there is a need for more black guards there— he now counts "less than 10" — and states that "isolated incidences" of brutality have occurred in Maryland's penal institutions.

Reed blamed "dehumanizing conditions" for the fact that prisoners sometimes assault guards.

"They want you to be submissive and try to break you," he stated. "When you first enter the jail, they strip you, look up your anus and start calling you by a number."

The former inmate described himself as a "political prisoner," meaning "I am aware of why I had to rob a place— because I was poor and black."